Minutes
The Greater Kansas City
Disabled Federal Employees Council
Wednesday, April 7, 2004
09:00 to 11:00 A.M.

Location: GSA Federal Complex
1500 East Bannister Road
Kansas City, MO
Heartland Room

Attendees: Jim Jordan, Cindy Hillman, Donald Ashworth, Daryl Sprague, Janet
Hutsell, Sultan Farakhen, Michelle Cain, Dan Perkins, Bobbie Mowery,
Jean A. Holiwell, Kendall Crosby

Our Acting Chairperson, Jim Jordan opened the meeting following our agenda:

1. Opening Reminders:
   A. Welcome new members and guests.
      The council members welcomed Kendall Crosby back and congratulated him
      on his recent accomplishments. People introduced themselves to the council.
   B. Attendance sign-in sheet was distributed and everyone signed in.
   C. Minutes from the March 3, 2004 meeting were distributed via e-mail to the
      entire council. Jim asked if everyone had received the minutes and if there
      were questions or items that needed discussion, etc. The council agreed to
      accept the minutes as recorded. There were no questions or comments on the
      minutes and Dan Perkins made the motion that we accept the minutes as
      recorded. Sultan Farakhen seconded that motion.

2. Old Business:
   A. Review the new Accommodation/Awareness Checklist for the FEB.
      (Daryl Sprague provided copies of the checklist for the attendees.)

      After the initial meeting in March to begin preparations on the new checklist,
      Daryl created a draft version and e-mailed it to council members asking for
      comments and/or corrections, etc. Several people participated in the work that
      was done and on March 31, 2004 Jim asked Daryl to send out a "final draft
      version" via e-mail to the entire council asking them to be ready for
      discussion at our April meeting.

      After that version was sent out Janet Hutsell identified several issues and
      offered suggestions to correct them. Those changes were made to the
      document before today's meeting and hardcopies were distributed at our
      meeting for use in the discussion. To start the discussion Janet explained her
      changes to the checklist.

Next, Daryl mentioned he had asked a coworker at FAA, who frequently speaks/presents at meetings, to review our checklist and provide additional ideas and comments. One of the concerns he identified was the lack of a definition for "reasonable" accommodations.

Discussion ensued and several members of our council described specific examples from their experiences planning meetings and dealing with issues while attempting to provide special accommodation requests. Others described their experiences in the role of the person who requested special accommodation for meetings. Out of that discussion we determined that we could help people better understand the roles of the Meeting Planner and the Meeting Attendee by making additional changes to our checklist.

First, we decided that we needed to change the tone of our document to make it more attractive to our target audience. By using the word "Checklist" council members were concerned that our audience might perceive this document as a list of things that "have to be done" verses "things that will help". Our goal is to make people aware of what they need to do in order to host productive meetings for all their attendees. To accomplish that goal it was decided to rename the checklist. The new name to make this a more friendly document is: **Meeting Accommodation/Awareness Considerations**

Continuing to think in a non-enforcement tone, but rather in a educational tone, Dan Perkins noted that in the realm of Federal Employment, the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act, People with Disabilities and Management are trained that there must be "undue burden" for the agency to deny a request for special accommodation. The fact is, in most cases there are resources available, people just need to ask for them. That can be added to the definitions section under reasonable accommodation.

Another suggestion by Jean A. Holiwell was for advertisements to be sent out with a long lead-time, when possible as much as 60 days, to allow people time to plan and to communicate with each other before an event or meeting. Attendees need time to plan on attending and to identify what they need in the way of accommodations (alternative formats of information, etc.) so they can notify the Meeting Planner. Meeting Planners need enough advance notice to arrange special accommodations based on the requests they receive. Under definitions "Ask people what they need" we can add a comment about lead-times being long enough for people to communicate with each other.

Several people mentioned that our federal agencies have different offices locally, but that there is a "local contact" that can help with accommodations issues. The important thing for us to capture is a reminder under our definitions that meeting planners should contact their "local agency resource" to ask for help providing special accommodations at events and/or meetings. This may be a Human Resource Office, Civil Rights Office, E.E.O. office, etc.

Other specific modifications that were suggested for our document include:

Meeting Location: Add to the end of item 5 "and will handle electric wheelchairs." Add to the end of item 11 "Make sure the location chosen for lodging has the correct number of ADA rooms or ADA Room Kits available for your guests. (Check to ensure these items are in working order don't assume they are because they are available.)"

Reasonable Accommodations: Item 3 add "Sign Language" in front of Interpreter. Following the first sentence add, "Ask the person who requests an Interpreter specifically what type of Sign Language Interpreter they are requesting."

During the meeting: item 2 needs to be deleted.

After these items were covered it was decided that these changes should be made to the document. The new version named: Meeting Accommodation/Awareness Considerations will me e-mailed to the council members for review and comments. When the feedback is finished we can vote on this new version by e-mail before it is submitted to Cindy Hillman for official distribution.

B. Discuss posting DFEC Minutes on the FEB website.
   In preparation for this discussion Daryl Sprague contacted Cindy Hillman to get the name of the person the council will work with on website issues. After talking with Mary Triay, Daryl submitted a follow-up e-mail to Mary with specific goals and questions for Mary to respond to. Those were read at the meeting to give people a sense of the possibilities for our use of the website. Excerpts from that e-mail dated April 6, 2004 from Mary are inserted for the record:
   (Daryl's question is first followed by a UPPERCASE response from Mary)

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Goals we are considering:
1.) Placing our Bylaws on the web
NOT A PROBLEM.  WILL NEED THE MOST RECENT FILE IN WORD SO I
CAN CONVERT TO A PDF
2.) Placing council meetings minutes on the web
AGAIN NOT A PROBLEM AS LONG AS I RECEIVE THE MINUTES IN A WORD
DOCUMENT.
3.) Providing PDF files for people to download from the web
(e.g. Meeting Accommodations/Awareness Checklist)
OKAY
4.) Posting information about projects that are currently
underway (Quarterly Council Meetings/Activities, etc.)
OKAY
5.) Updating existing information that we know is out of date.
CAN DO - PLEASE REVIEW WEBSITE AND LET ME KNOW WHAT THE
CHANGES ARE.
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Questions to help us understand this resource:
1.) What are the council's responsibilities to get information
posted on the web? Do we prepare a Microsoft Word document
and ask for it to be places on the website as a PDF file for
download or do we provide a PDF file?
YES, I PREFER A WORD DOCUMENT (OR A PDF FILE)
2.) How do we prepare webpages to place information on the
website? Can we create HTML pages and send them to you or are
we limited to preparing graphics, text, etc. then providing a
layout to the web administrator?
I DO NOT BELIEVE WE ARE LIMITED. I WOULD SUGGEST NOT TO USE
TO MANY GRAPHIC AS SOME COMPUTERS ARE SLOW, BUT YES, I CAN
TAKE HTML PAGES AND ATTACH THEM WHERE REQUESTED.
3.) If we want graphics can we request help from the web
administrator or are we limited to what our council members or
other resources we have can create for our projects?
GRAPHIC ARE FINE!
4.) Does our website have to ability to create an e-mail list
service that could be used to distribute information to
people?
THIS I AM NOT SURE OF. I DO NOT KNOW HOW TO DO THIS. IF YOU
KNOW OF SOMEONE WHO CAN SHOW ME I WILL BE HAPPY TO DO IT.
5.) Do we have the ability to create discussion boards for
topics of interest to our user community?
AGAIN, THIS I AM NOT SURE OF. I DO NOT KNOW HOW TO DO THIS.
IF YOU KNOW OF SOMEONE WHO CAN SHOW ME I WILL BE HAPPY TO DO
IT.
6.) How long does it take once we give you a request to get
our website updated?
IT DEPENDS ON MY WORK LOAD. I TRY TO DO THINGS IN A TIMELY
MANNER, A WEEK WINDOW FOR GETTING THINGS ON THE SITE WOULD BE
A GOOD TIMELINE.
7.) Is there capability to create a database and maintain it
on-line? (e.g. Event registrations, etc.)
THIS IS SOMETHING THAT I WILL BE LOOKING INTO FOR THE FEB AS A
WHOLE.
8.) Does the web administrator check everything to ensure it
is Section 508 compliant? (Webpages, PDF files, etc.)
THE PAGES THAT I CREATE I CHECK TO MAKE SURE THEY ARE 508
COMPLIANT. IF I RECEIVE ATTACHMENTS TO BE PUT ON THE WEB, I
WILL ASSUME THAT THE CREATOR CHECKED FOR COMPLAINCE.

After reading this information to the council we discussed web related issues.
We determined that ensuring the council's website is Section 508 compliant is
our responsibility. To ensure that is done correctly, Jean A. Holiwell
suggested we use local resources (she has a contact when we need it) to test
our site when posting information there.

The council agreed unanimously to start planning to place information on the
FEB/DFEC website beginning with updating our main page with correct
meeting dates and times. Adding a new page that contains our meeting
schedule for at least 90 days in advance. Adding our Bylaws, our Council

Meeting Minutes and the past project, known as the "Tri-fold Brochure" along with our new Meeting Accommodation/Awareness Considerations document. Each member agreed that a short Biography for each of us might be useful to our target audience as well.

It was agreed that Daryl should work with Mary to make updates to the website to get it up-to-date and place the other items we discussed on the site for use. Kendal Crosby agreed to prepare the Tri-Fold Brochure for the website.

Kendall Crosby suggested that after changes are made to the website we demonstrate the new website changes at a future meeting so people could see the progress. We could then discuss other improvements at that meeting.

C. Computer/Electronic Accommodation Program (CAP) CD-ROM presentation. Due to technical difficulties this presentation was scheduled for the next meeting.

3. New Business:
   A. Section 508 program at the federal agencies.
      This topic was introduced by Jim Jordan describing the fact that GSA was the lead agency for Section 508. There is a website www.section508.gov with a sole purpose of educating people about this ADA Law. One of our members asked that we clarify what Section 508 is and Jim provided a short summary.

      (The following excerpt is taken from the website and inserted to capture Jim's summary: In 1998, Congress amended the Rehabilitation Act to require Federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities. Inaccessible technology interferes with an individual's ability to obtain and use information quickly and easily. Section 508 was enacted to eliminate barriers in information technology, to make available new opportunities for people with disabilities, and to encourage development of technologies that will help achieve these goals.)

      Daryl Sprague provided a website for people who want to look at training programs created by FAA. The website is www.faa.gov/aio/ on that webpage there is a section "Information Management" that contains a link FAA Section 508 Training (Self-Study) NEW! These courses were produce by FAA Section 508 Coordinator in headquarters and were taught in each region in 2003. Subjects include History, Procurement, Web Applications, Software, and Video and Multimedia.

      Discussion continued and people described examples of Section 508 that they were familiar with. For example people who use screen readers to view web pages will not know what a picture on a webpage is unless the webpage is programmed correctly with a description telling the reader what it is.

Members once again gave examples of how this ADA law affected their ability to do their job. We learned that a person using a screen reader on a computer that accesses new up-to-date programs would work fine in most cases. However, if there was a older program written in COBOL that had not been updated the screen reader program could not read that screen to the user.

The cumulative experience in our meeting helped us all realize that people who have experience in these areas typically build networks of people and companies to help them learn and accomplish their goals. By working together with their Information Technology Support Staff, specific vendors who specialize in the sale, installation, configuration and training of the hardware and software components and other people they meet who have experiences to share, they are able to use technology to accomplish their jobs.

This discussion helped us realize how important it is to create and maintain a list of resources including company, contact, and product and to ensure the local Information Technology people and the people providing tools in this specialized area are all communicated with before implementing a new installation or updating existing tools. If that is not done, those with experience told us, there could be long periods of time without their computer functioning as required to do their work.

One of our members also gave us an example of mentoring. The story began with the fact that he had met a person who didn't know how to use the assistive technology that was installed on their computer. This wasn't a new situation, the person had a long period of time in which to learn how to use this system, but hadn't been able to do so. The story continued, that after our member found out about the person's problems, and offered to explain how to use the computer system from his own personal experiences, his offer was accepted. That connection between the two individuals who had similar situations, and the fact that the person needing to learn opened up to the help, made it possible for the learning to begin. When this person had the benefit of a person with experience, that actually understood and could communicate with them, to tell them what they needed by taking time to share their personal expertise, it enabled that person to become productive on the computer and in their job. All that was needed was a person with experience who was willing to share a little of their time to help another human being get started. When that happened it made all the difference in the world. A true success story!

Following that story we agreed that perhaps one of the biggest contributions our council could make to people would be to share these types of "success stories" with our audience. Doing so in a positive manner will help a lot of people. In many cases people don't know where to go for help. People don't know who's out there doing what and we can get the word out by sharing our experiences.

The final discussion included the mention of how people need to be told that the money, often times, doesn't come out of their budget. There are resources in place to fund things like equipment, Occupational Therapists who can do evaluations and job assessments for people to help them get equipment and learn how to do their job, and programs like the CAP program to help people get the tools they need. Our meeting today had specific examples how this investment can make people into success stories, a true "win – win" for federal agencies managers and employees.

B. Next DFEC meeting in May is a combined FEB Council meeting with the date, time and location to be announced.

Cindy Hillman provided us the date of May 19, 2004 and told us the plan is for the Asian Pacific Council to host the luncheon meeting at a restaurant up north during the lunch hour (11 to 1 timeframe). Specific's will be sent out when it is available via e-mail.

4. Comments/Announcements:
During Kendall Crosby's absence he sent our members a thank you note which Bobby Mowery read to our members. Kendall gave us a short briefing of his recent experiences and shared with us that he was excited to get back to his position as Chair of our council. After that announcement, Jim Jordan who had been filling in for Kendall, officially announced that he was handing off the Chair responsibilities to Kendall as of the close of our meeting today. We expressed our appreciation to Jim for filling in for Kendall and the wonderful job he had done in that capacity.

The meeting was adjourned.